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Trash from Everest recycled into sculpture





Visitors look at art made from trash collected on Mount Everest, in Kathmandu. A group of artists is staging an exhibition of sculpture made from tonnes of trash collected on Mount Everest, highlighting the toll that decades of mountaineering have taken on the world's highest peak. Discarded oxygen and cooking gas cylinders, ropes, tents, glasses, beer cans, plastic and even the remains of a helicopter make up 75 artworks commissioned for the "Everest 8848 Art Project" on display in Kathmandu. AFP PHOTO / Prakash MATHEMA.

By: Deepak Adhikari



KATHMANDU (AFP).- Discarded oxygen cylinders, ropes, tents, beer cans and even the remains of a helicopter have been turned into sculpture to highlight waste littering the slopes of Mount Everest.

Artists worked with tonnes of debris collected from the world's highest mountain to create an exhibition of 75 pieces commissioned for the "Everest 8848 Art Project" and currently on display in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu.

Sixty-five porters and 75 yaks amassed a total of eight tonnes of trash which they carried down from the mountain over two Spring season expeditions.

"We thought that this would help promote the artists as well as contribute to making Everest clean," said project organiser Kripa Rana Shahi.

"We were happy to get the trash and (the waste collectors) were happy to get rid of it."

Fifteen Nepalese artists spent a month in workshops preparing pieces for the exhibition, which opened in a luxury hotel in Kathmandu and will move to the tourist hub of Pokhara next week.

In one of the works by painter and poet Sunita Rana, white shards of aluminium from drinks cans are fashioned into medals signifying the bravery of mountaineers, while black metal tent poles are transformed into a wind chime.

In another, remains of a helicopter which crashed in 1974 while carrying food for Italian climbers are incorporated into an idol of the Hindu God Ganesh.

The artworks range in price from 1,500 rupees (\$17) to 200,000, and several pieces have already been sold.

Around 4,000 people have climbed the 8,848-metre (29,028-foot) Himalayan peak, which straddles Nepal and China, since it was first conquered by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953.

Environmental activists say Everest is littered with the detritus of past expeditions, including human waste and mountaineers' corpses, which do not decompose because of the extreme cold.

Climbers spend tens of thousands of dollars trying to reach the summit, but local sherpas complain that few pay much attention to the rubbish they leave behind.

Expeditions currently have to fork out a \$4,000 deposit, which is refundable once they show they have brought back everything they took onto the mountain. But officials say the rules are difficult to implement.

"As the word on the Everest garbage spread, it tarnished the image of our country. I was saddened when the foreigners talked about Everest as if it were a dumping site," said Everest Summiteers Association president Wongchu Sherpa.

As well as oxygen canisters, the detritus used for the exhibition includes food containers, glasses, plastic and backpacks dating back to the 1970s.

"We have recommended that if a climber is found littering the mountain, he or she should be banned for five years from climbing," Sherpa told AFP.

"In the past, we have conducted random checks and have asked climbers to collect the trash that he or she disposes of."

The artists hope to raise enough cash to transport the works and have them installed in the Everest region itself as a reminder of the damage littering can do to the environment.

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